



by Rabbi Dr Raymond Apple z"l

VAYCHI

ZAIDIE, MY ZAIDIE

The song is "Zaidie, My Zaidie".

It speaks about having grandfather living with the family, and what happens when he is no longer there.

We do not know whether the parents of Zaidie's grandchildren are prosperous or important. All we know is that Zaidie is desperate to maintain the Jewish life of the family, and that when Zaidie goes this may be under threat.

The song could have been written about Yaakov and his grandsons Efrayim and Menashe. Their father has power second only to Par'o. The home has affluence and prestige. But to Yaakov, it is not that dimension which is uppermost. He is concerned with their Jewishness.

Hence the prayer, "God before whom walked my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak; God, my shepherd all my life to this day; the angel who saved me from all evil, bless the lads; may they be called by my name and that of my fathers Avraham and Yitzchak, and grow into a great people on the earth" (B'reishit 48:15-16).

The sages say Efrayim was modest and studious, though his descendants were often unfaithful. Menashe was strong and courageous, but his descendants transgressed. What Yaakov would have said can be imagined.

As a parable of Jewish history, this is a constant problem. The younger generation has sometimes been admirable in its Jewish loyalty, and sometimes gravely disappointing.

Most parents and grandparents want to give enough grounding in Jewish values and commitments to be reasonably sure their children and grandchildren will be a credit to the patriarch.

Earlier generations had it easier. The temptations and distractions open to Jewish youth were severely limited. Going astray was more difficult. Few fell by the wayside. The world Jewish population was small, but the vast majority of Jews were loyal.

Now of course the world has changed. Hardly a Jew does not live in an open society. "Back to the Ghetto" is not an option. There are pressures that pull us out of Judaism, temptations and allurements that are more exciting.

Would Jacob weep?

The answer is yes - and no. We lose Jews by reason of drift and deser-

tion, apathy and indifference. Levels of Jewish knowledge and observance are often low. Basic Jewish observances are never seen in some homes. Jews are to be found everywhere, but not in Judaism. Yaakov would weep.

But there is also so much happening that is positive. Yaakov would weep for joy. Due to many factors, Jewish identity is strong and visible, especially amongst young people.

Children are bringing parents back to Judaism. Homes are becoming kosher. People are becoming Shomrei Shabbat. Jewish education is flourishing. Yeshivot have never been so numerous, full and powerful. Many people are finding fulfilment in Aliya, or at least visiting and being enthused by Israel.

And all of this is by voluntary choice. No external forces are sending us back to our Jewish roots.

Efrayim and Menashe are bringing joy to the old man. Zaidie is content. -OZ

Y'HI ZICHRO BARUCH